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ABSTRACT

This study determined the effectiveness of a conflict resolution curriculum on the attitudes and interactions of 18 seventh-grade students at a suburban middle school that served predominantly Caucasian, middle-class students. Students completed the curriculum 3 days per week for 7 weeks. Before and after the program, students filled out the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts, which had students rate 30 statements related to attitudes toward conflicts (what they thought conflict was, types of conflicts experienced, how conflicts were resolved, behaviors during conflict situations, and their role and responsibility in the conflicts). Each student received a conflict resolution journal that contained handouts for use with the conflict resolution curriculum to help them become aware of their feelings, reactions, and personal progress in response to the curriculum. Students shared in their journals the actual conflicts they encountered and how they resolved them. Each week, they filled out a conflict journal log sheet. The project director also kept a journal to record informational observations during the 7-week conflict resolution curriculum. Data analysis indicated that there were significant changes in students' attitudes toward conflicts and how to resolve them following implementation of the curriculum. Students became more effective in resolving conflicts once they participated in the curriculum. (Contains 30 references.) (SM)

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# Seventh-Grade Students' Attitudes Toward Conflict Before and After Applying A Conflict Resolution Curriculum

by

Karen D. Mantovani

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This project has been completed in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Arts in Teaching Degree in Middle School Classroom Teaching; Saginaw Valley State University, College of Education. Winter 1999.

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This project has been completed in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Arts in Teaching Degree in Middle School Classroom Teaching: Saginaw Valley State University, College of Education. Winter 1999.

**Dedication**

This research project is dedicated to my mother, Carolyn Mantovani and my father, John Mantovani. My parents have both inspired me in so many ways and I will be eternally grateful to them for my education and life.

**Acknowledgements**

Many people have contributed to the creation of this research project. My deepest appreciation goes to Antoinette DeSanto, my colleague and friend, for giving me the bright idea to do this project on conflict resolution. She immediately gave me an abundance of resources to use and get me started. Her encouragement and guidance throughout the entire project will always be remembered. Thank you, Antoinette.

To my mother and father, for giving me the gift of love and for showing me that conflict is a normal part of life. To my sisters, Patrice, Janet, and Kristen, and my brother Michael, for all the conflicts we have had to resolve as siblings. To my Auntie Mary Mantovani, for sharing your opinions on many matters in life.

I also want to acknowledge all of my other good friends, for their continuous support and encouragement. You are truly appreciated.

**Quotations**

*"A good example is the best sermon."* -- Ben Franklin

*"We should learn from the mistakes of others. We don't have time to make them all ourselves."* -- Groucho Marx

*"It is a luxury to be understood."* -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*"Most people spend more time and energy going around problems than in trying to solve them."* -- Henry Ford

*"I never saw an instance of one or two disputants convincing the other by argument."* -- Thomas Jefferson

*"I destroy my enemy by making him my friend."* -- Abraham Lincoln

*"It is better to swallow words than to have to eat them later."* -- Franklin D. Roosevelt

*"Our task is not to fix the blame for the past, but to fix the course for the future."* -- John F. Kennedy

*"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can break my heart."* -- Robert Fulghum

*"The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil."* -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*"The only way to have a friend is to be one."* -- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*"We must learn to live together as brothers or we are going to perish together as fools."* -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

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The possibility for conflict exists everywhere. Conflicts arise out of everyday differences of opinion, disagreements, and the interplay of different ideas, needs, drives, wishes, lifestyles, values, beliefs, interests, and personalities of people (Scott, 1990). As many as one in four children in the United States are at high risk of failing to mature into responsible and productive adulthood (Danoff, 1996). Adolescents are at high risk for violent crime (St. George & Thomas, 1997). Although they make up only fourteen percent of the population age twelve and over, thirty percent of all violent crimes -- 1.9 million -- are committed against adolescents (Travis, 1997).

Adolescents are at risk of being both victims and perpetrators of violence (Travis, 1997). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (1992), there is a substantial increase in the violence victimization rates for adolescents. There were more than 1.55 million violent crimes committed against youth aged twelve to seventeen in 1992, a twenty-five percent increase since 1988 (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). Victimization rates for simple assault are highest among young people ages twelve to nineteen (Lockwood, 1997).

Data from assault studies reveal that arguments resulting in violence are a considerable problem for American youths, as both victims and aggressors (Travis, 1997). The problem is increasing, because while some types of violent crime are declining, the risk of being a victim of this type of crime has risen since the mid-1980s among juveniles

ages twelve to seventeen, especially among African-Americans (Lockwood, 1997). The same is true with the more serious offense of aggravated assault; juvenile arrests for this offense are projected to rise (Travis, 1997). Among children ages five to fourteen, homicide is the third leading cause of death, and among fifteen to twenty-four year olds, homicide ranks at number two (St. George & Thomas, 1997).

About the same proportion of youth are committing serious offenses today as in 1980 (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). Aggravated assault and even homicide, which include young people as victims and offenders, often result from events similar to those triggering less serious offenses (Travis, 1997). However, today's violent acts are more lethal, and can result in serious injury or death. Between 1988 and 1992, juvenile arrests for murder increased by fifty-one percent, compared to nine percent for adults (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). Because crimes against adolescents are likely to be committed by offenders of the same age (as well as same sex and race), preventing violence among and against adolescents is a twofold challenge (Travis, 1997).

Youth experience violence in places familiar to them, such as in and around school (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). The violence occurring at schools is astounding (Lockwood, 1997). Students who reported fighting at least once within the year of 1997 ranged from twenty-nine to sixty percent among various adolescent populations (St. George & Thomas, 1997). According to National Crime Victimization Surveys for 1985 to 1988, thirty-seven percent of violent victimization of youth between twelve and fifteen years of age occurred at school (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). An estimated sixteen percent of all high school students in this country have been in one or more physical fights on school property in the course of a year (Travis, 1995).

Adolescent violence is partly attributable to escalating sequences of events that

culminate in outcomes unintended by the participants (St. George & Thomas, 1997). Although the young people who engage in violence do not intend the outcome, they nevertheless suffer the consequences--either the harm that comes from being victimized to the punishment that comes from being the aggressor (Travis, 1997). When adolescents engage in fighting, they place themselves in physical danger (St. George & Thomas, 1997). Delinquency and violence are symptoms of a juvenile's inability to handle conflict constructively (Bilchick, 1997).

In some important ways, adolescents are growing up faster than before. For example, biological puberty occurs earlier than in the past (Kett, 1977). Problems such as substance abuse, school failure, alienation from the family, and other kinds of unhealthy behavior found among older teens in the 1960s, are now being found in the eight- to thirteen- year old population (Danoff, 1996). Researchers have begun to identify key factors in both the physical and psychosocial environment that may place youth at increased risk for violence, such as poverty and family disorganization (St. George & Thomas, 1997).

**Significance of the Project**

Teachers, administrators, parents, and students, alike, acknowledge that discipline is a major concern in our nation's schools (Borquist & Schmidgall, 1997). Both students and teachers feel unsafe and insecure due to increasingly violent, disruptive behaviors of students (Lockwood, 1997). According to Wadsworth (1994-95), executive director of Public Agenda, a nonprofit opinion research organization, almost nine of ten Americans "believe that dependability and discipline make a great deal of difference in how students behave." In 1975, over twenty years ago, unruly students were described as behind in

their work, making disruptive noises, not listening to directions, never on time, picking on each other, and talking back to the teacher. In 1995 unruly students were described as not doing their work, throwing objects at each other, unable to listen because of drugs and alcohol, skipping school, bringing weapons to school and more likely to physically harm the teacher (Girard, 1995).

"Lack of discipline" was judged the biggest problem faced by local public schools, in eighteen of twenty-six prior Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Polls (Borquist & Schmidgall, 1997). Fifteen percent of those who responded, mentioned discipline and lack of student control, as major problems in public schools. Nine percent listed "fighting/violence/gangs" and three percent listed "lack of respect" as major problems. The public overwhelmingly believes that violence in the public schools is not only increasing at the national school level (eighty-nine percent) but sixty-seven percent believes it is increasing in local schools. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1995) "three million crimes occur in or near school property each year. Such violence deprives students of their rights to quality education." According to some research conducted (Furlong, Morrison, & Dear, 1995), reports indicated that one in every ten students fall victim to some act of aggression. The majority of the aggressive acts consisted of bullying, verbal/physical threats, shoving, fist fights, and other simple assaults, though more violent attacks on teachers and students grabbed media attention.

In 1994, the Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll showed that the vast majority of the public believed that together poor discipline and violence were the most serious problems in their local schools for the first time ever (Borquist & Schmidgall, 1997). In 1995, twenty-four percent felt that the major cause of student violence in public school was a

"lack of parent control, discipline, supervision, involvement and values" (Girard, 1995). Another six percent felt that pupil's attitudes, boredom, disrespect and lack of self-esteem were the major causes of student violence (Borquist & Schmidgall, 1997).

The findings about the extent of violence by and against youth are among the most significant in suggesting the urgency and importance of developing comprehensive cognitive, school-based interventions (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). According to National Crime Victimization Surveys for 1985 to 1988, thirty-seven percent of violent victimization of youth between twelve and fifteen years- of- age occur at school (Allen-Hagen & Sickmund, 1993). Youth experience violence in places familiar to them, such as in and around school (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997).

There is a substantial increase in the violence victimization rates for adolescents (Elliot, 1994). There are more than 1.55 million violent crimes committed against youth aged twelve to seventeen in 1992, a twenty-five percent increase since 1984 (National Crime Victimization Survey, 1992). About the same proportion of youth are committing serious violent offenses today as in 1980. Today's violent acts, however, are more lethal, and can result in serious injury or death (Elliot, 1994). Between 1988 and 1992, juvenile arrests for murder increased by fifty-one percent, compared to nine percent for adults (Allen-Hagen & Sickmund, 1993).

Two reports on youth violence published by the National Institute of Justice indicated the extent of violence in the schools. In one study of inner-city high schools in four states, eighty percent of student respondents reported that other students carried weapons to school, while sixty-six percent of respondents said they personally knew someone who carried weapons to school (Sheley, McGee, & Wright, 1995). In schools described as particularly troubled, one in five students had been shot at, stabbed, or

otherwise injured with a weapon at or en route to school. In a second study of students from nine high schools, thirty-nine percent reported being in a situation that might have led to a fight in the previous week (Delong, 1994). Nineteen percent reported carrying a gun at least once during a six- month period.

Among children ages five to fourteen, homicide is the third leading cause of death, and among fifteen- to twenty-four year olds, homicide ranks at number two (Gardner & Hudson, 1996). In response to this escalating epidemic of youth violence, reduction in adolescent violence has been declared a national health objective for the year 2000 (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1990). The "Healthy People 2000" objective for the nation seeks to reduce by twenty percent the incidence of physical fighting among adolescents ages fourteen through seventeen. When adolescents engage in fighting, they place themselves in physical danger (St. George & Thomas, 1997). Results from the National Adolescent Student Health Survey (NASHS) of eighth- and tenth- graders showed that students do not perceive fighting as very risky (American School Health Association, 1989). To plan effective violence prevention education in schools, it is important to understand determinants of youth fighting behavior (St. George & Thomas, 1997).

Violence is a symptom of a youth's inability to handle conflict constructively (Bilchick, 1997). By teaching young people how to manage conflict, conflict resolution education can reduce violence in schools and communities, while providing lifelong decision-making skills (Pereira & Rodriguez, 1997). These programs also combat chronic truancy and reduce the number of suspensions and disciplinary referrals (St. George & Thomas, 1997). Conflict resolution education teaches the skills needed to engage in creative problem solving (Jasmine, 1997). Disputants in a conflict learn to identify their

interests, express their views, and seek mutually acceptable solutions (Schmidt & Friedman, 1990).

**Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this project, therefore, was to determine the effectiveness a conflict resolution curriculum had on the attitudes and interactions of seventh-grade students.

## REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This review of related literature includes information from studies investigating mainly students in middle schools. Each literature review explains the study conducted, including the purpose of the study, the procedures followed, and the findings from the study. Because this research project is on conflict resolution, most of the literature in this review is on conflicts and conflict resolution.

The focus of this literature review was on three main areas. First, studies focusing on middle school aged students' perceptions of fighting was reviewed. Next, study findings analyzing violence in middle schools were reviewed. Lastly reviewed were conflict resolution and violence intervention programs that had been implemented and evaluated.

The first study to be reviewed evaluated the association between perceived risk of fighting and actual fighting behavior among middle school students and determined if that relationship was modified by race, gender, or grade level. St. George and Thomas (1997) obtained survey data from a stratified random sample of 517 Black and White middle school students. The study questionnaire assessed conflict resolution strategies, perceived risks of fighting, and actual fighting behaviors. To plan effective violence prevention education in schools, it is important to understand determinants of youth fighting behavior. Therefore, this study investigated the association between perceived risk of fighting and actual fighting behavior among young adolescents.

Study findings indicated that perceived risk of fighting was quite high among this population. Nearly three of every four students thought fighting was a risky behavior.

One of every five students in this study regularly engaged in fighting. An additional thirty-five percent reported that they had fought in the past but did not do so anymore. Males were more likely than females to fight regularly, and fighting prevalence was higher in the upper grades. The effect of risk perception on fighting behavior varied by race, but was associated more strongly with fighting among White than among Black adolescents. In conclusion, St. George and Thomas suggest that violence prevention programs consider perceptions and attitudes about violence. School violence prevention education should include an emphasis on the health risks of fighting and attention to cultural differences in risk perceptions.

The next study reviewed was on violent incidents among middle and high school students focused not only on the types and frequency of these incidents but also on their dynamics -- the locations, the "opening moves," the relationship between disputants, the goals and justifications of the aggressor, the role of third parties, and other factors. Lockwood (1997) drew information from in-depth interviews with 110 students who attend public schools in which the level of violence is high. The design of this study was chosen to provide information that can be used in the curricula of school-based conflict resolution programs.

Data showed that the problem of violence is growing, as is juveniles' risk of victimization. The violent incidents were analyzed to create general models of the sequence or pattern of events in the interactions among disputants. The analysis confirmed that the opening moves involved such actions as minor as slights and teasing, but escalated. Most incidents took place largely among young people who knew each other, and most incidents started in the school or the home. What is perhaps the most troubling is the finding that the students' violent behavior did not stem from lack of

values. Rather, it was grounded in a well-developed set of values that holds such behavior to be a justifiable, common sense way to achieve certain goals. In adopting the findings to violence prevention programs, reducing the frequency of opening moves may be the most promising approach.

Another study reviewed focused on how students in urban middle schools are at high risk for personal experiences with and exposure to extreme forms of violence; these experiences are then reflected in the students' own conflict styles and behaviors. In a study sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and directed by Jeremy Travis (1995) two violence prevention programs in urban middle schools were evaluated for sixteen months: Project S.T.O.P. (Schools Teaching Options for Peace), a traditional conflict resolution program, which included a curriculum and peer mediation; and The Safe Harbor Program, which included a twenty minute session curriculum, a counseling component, and a school wide anti-violence campaign.

Data sources for evaluation included self-reported background inventories on students' experiences with violence, self-administered tests completed by students, semi-structured interviews with seventy-two students and thirty-seven teachers, and school statistics on disciplinary actions related to fighting and weapons possession.

This study showed that students at high risk for personal experiences with and exposure to severe forms of conflict sought participation in these programs. The Project S.T.O.P. program led students to use reasoning more frequently to resolve conflicts, and the Safe Harbor program changed their beliefs in the necessity of violent retaliation. Higher participation in one or both of the violence prevention programs was associated with higher victimization. Participation in both programs also altered the belief that respect was achieved through violence.

In the next study, Pereira and Rodriguez (1997) report on a violence prevention program being tested in nineteen fifth grade classrooms in Chicago and Los Angeles. It involves the integration of conflict resolution into the curriculum as part of the strategy for reducing violence. The research design for the program incorporates quantitative measurements of student knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as qualitative descriptions based on in-class observations, teacher logs, and focus group discussions with students, teachers, and parents.

The first year findings showed that the youth participating in the program demonstrated a significantly decrease in normative beliefs about the acceptability of aggression. Results from focus group interviews with students indicate that participation in the program taught them ways to solve problems other than by using violence. Additionally, many youth reported that they now used violence less often when confronted by a problem, and tried to use mediation skills, although often unsuccessfully.

An action research project was reviewed that implemented and evaluated an intervention program to reduce inappropriate behavioral incidents among early adolescent students. Borquist and Schmidgall (1997) targeted a population that consisted of middle school students in an urban area and high school students in a rural area in the Midwest. The problem of inappropriate behaviors was documented by means of teacher observations, office discipline referrals, and student surveys. Analysis of the site information suggested that issues related to inadequate facilities, under staffing, and parental involvement were possible probable causes for inappropriate behaviors. Further analysis of the middle school site revealed demographic changes such as population shifts, single parent families, and low socioeconomic status as possible contributing factors.

In this intervention project, a review of solution strategies resulted in the selection

of a conflict resolution program. This intervention had a positive influence on the behaviors of the targeted students. The number and severity of the discipline problems were reduced. The degree of success depended on the frequency and severity of the inappropriate behaviors. The age of the students also affected the degree to which intervention was successful.

Also reviewed was a study conducted by Abood (1995) on a practicum designed to address the problem of middle school students reacting to and handling conflict situations with violent behavior in an urban environment. The major goal was for middle school students to increase their awareness of conflicts as a natural part of daily life and resolve them without violence through problem-solving skills. The participants were sixty sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The following tools were developed for this practicum: student questionnaire; thirty-two interactive classes for middle school students; teacher survey; direct observation checklist; appropriate handouts; and a two-session workshop for educators and parents on conflict management and prosocial skills.

Analysis of the data from the study demonstrated that middle school students became more aware of conflict management skills during a conflict situation and were able to resolve conflict without violence through problem-solving strategies. Additionally there was a decrease in confrontational behavior during incidences of potential disruption.

In another action research project, Ahrens, Barrett, and Holtzman (1997) report on a program in interpersonal skill development that was conducted in order to increase the use of applied social skills. The targeted population consists of middle school students in diverse suburban communities. Evidence for the problem included observation checklists, teacher and student surveys, and discipline referrals.

Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students may exhibit

inappropriate skills in the classroom setting because of an increase in single parent families, increased TV viewing, and dual income families. Faculty reported an increase in cultural intolerance. A review of solution strategies resulted in intervention program to improve conflict resolution skills. The post interview data indicated that students exhibited an increase in their ability to recognize and resolve conflicts. They were able to communicate more effectively with both their peers and teachers.

Another study reviewed was on the implementation of a program for teaching conflict resolution strategies in a primary classroom. Bastianello (1989) studied how an experienced primary school teacher designed a practicum to teach conflict resolution in a suburban school. The main goal was to train students in prosocial skills so that they could resolve their conflicts with classmates peacefully, quickly, and without involving an adult.

To achieve this goal, the practitioner: (1) sent a questionnaire to teachers in the school to assess the amount of class time spent in conflict; (2) conducted an observational assessment to gather additional information on the amount of class time expended in disputes; (3) taught conflict resolution strategies to students; (4) oversaw groups who were using the strategies; and (5) presented, with the aid of students, a conflict resolution training workshop for teachers.

Practicum evaluation data indicated that the intervention had positive outcomes. The amount of time involved in conflict declined and the use of various prosocial methods of conflict resolution increased.

A study was done by Khattri (1991) to evaluate the social validity of the interventions of conflict resolution and cooperative learning at an inner-city high school. The evaluation explored students' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness and

applicability of the interventions in their lives. Extensive interviews were conducted, and questionnaire data were collected from teachers and students. The student population was primarily Black and Hispanic American from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, teachers gave feedback on the training they received for doing cooperative learning and conflict resolution lessons with their students.

Students found the interventions to be useful and experienced interpersonal improvements in their lives. The teachers gave moderate endorsement of the interventions and considered cooperative learning to be useful for their students' academic learning and social and psychological development. Teachers judged conflict resolution to be moderately valuable for the students' development and quite useful in the students' everyday lives. Overall, the results indicate that cooperative learning and conflict resolution programs were useful and valid.

A middle school principal with seventeen years of experience as a classroom teacher implemented a practicum designed to develop positive, long-lasting social skills among elementary school students in the intermediate grades (Parkhurst, 1988). The primary goal of the intervention was to decrease the number of instances in which students used verbal or physical aggression to solve conflicts in informal and unsupervised situations. A second aim was to provide students with strategies for solving conflicts peacefully.

The principal and intermediate grade teachers selected the Creative Conflict Resolution for Kids program for implementation. Implementation involved: (1) in-service training for teachers who, in turn, trained students; (2) monitoring of the progress of students in applying skills learned; (3) assistance to teachers who monitored students; and (4) collection and review of practicum evaluation data.

Data indicated that outcomes of the intervention were positive. The number of students referred to the principal because of aggressive behavior decreased, as did the number of verbal conflicts on the playground. Students requested opportunities to discuss conflicts with peers. Close relationships between teachers and students developed as a result of classroom discussions of conflict resolution.

Lanham and Baker (1997) conducted an action research project that implemented and evaluated a ten-week conflict resolution program to improve the behavior of fifth- and eighth- grade students. Participating were eighth graders from a large suburban school district with a diverse socioeconomic background, and fifth graders from a growing suburban school district with a high mortality rate.

The problems of inappropriate behaviors for resolving personal conflicts were documented through discipline referrals, teacher journal entries, teacher surveys, and student self-assessment. The solution strategies were comprised of cooperative learning groups, conflict resolution training, and character education activities conducted for twenty-five to forty-five minutes each day for three or five days per week. Activities were related to building trust of other group members, developing social skills, solving problems, resolving conflict, and expressing feelings.

Post-intervention results indicated that teaching skills conducive to appropriate behaviors for resolving personal conflict decreased the number of negative behaviors displayed in the classroom, such as loud or abusive language and lack of respect for others. Discipline referrals declined throughout the intervention period. Student assessments revealed a decrease in all negative responses to conflict and an increase in nonviolent responses.

In another research project, a program used for improving the social skills of third

graders attending a middle-class suburban school is described. The researcher (Moreau, 1994) selected a resolution program which would address those problems outlined by a classroom teacher in an incident report, a teacher reflection journal, and a teacher's record of time spent on conflict resolution in the classroom.

An analysis of the probable cause data revealed that students were unaware of options available to them to solve problems on their own. Likewise, many of the strategies students used to resolve conflict were ineffective. Solutions suggested by experts, combined with an examination of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of two major categories of intervention: (1) develop lesson plans to teach the predescribed steps for conflict resolution; and (2) teach conflict resolution for thirty minutes daily over a six week period. After training, students learned how to communicate and how to understand the severity of their problems. Results also indicate that parents who adopted a conflict resolution program at home increased the effectiveness of the conflict resolution program.

The Conflict Resolution Advisory Team has been involved with establishing and maintaining Conflict Resolution programs at Toronto Board (Canada) elementary and secondary schools. Research and Assessment was requested to support the Advisory Team in an evaluation of the programs in 1995 (Brown, 1996). Questionnaires were sent to students and teachers, and telephone interviews were conducted with facilitators of Conflict Resolution programs. The survey found that although teachers and students had, on the whole, positive attitudes about the school they attended, teachers were more positive than were students. Additional findings were reported in regard to: how safe students and teachers felt their schools were, the degree to which students talked with adults if they had problems, the types of conflicts observed, the frequency of conflicts,

the experiences students and teachers had of being threatened, the locations of conflicts, how conflicts were resolved, and the perceived effectiveness of the Conflict Resolution Program.

Along with the literature reviewed was a digest that discussed several approaches, both inservice and preservice, to preparing teachers to play a role in conflict resolution within schools (Girard, 1995). The digest also identified problematic issues related to this preparation such as principal's leadership, targeted follow-up support to teachers, the fit (or lack of it) between program demands and resources, and the need for systemic, school-wide change versus individual classroom change. Although educators primarily learn about conflict resolution on their own or through staff development programs, this paper encourages substantial training.

The inclusion of conflict resolution curriculums within preservice and graduate education programs has found its way into schools and departments of education in a variety of ways. For example, the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) and the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR) initiated the Conflict Resolution in Teacher Education Program Project in 1993. That project brought eleven colleges and universities together in a pilot program with experts in prejudice reduction, conflict resolution, multiculturalism, and teacher education.

LeBoeuf & Delany-Shabazz (1997) published a conflict resolution fact sheet. By teaching young people how to manage conflict, conflict resolution education can reduce juvenile violence in juvenile facilities, schools, and communities, while providing lifelong decision-making skills. Conflict resolution programs also combat chronic truancy and reduce the number of suspensions and disciplinary referrals. Their potential for use in urban schools and youth programs is obvious.

Conflict resolution programs are most effective when they involve the entire facility or school community, are integrated into institutional management practices and the educational curriculum, and are linked to family and community mediation initiatives. There are four general approaches to conflict resolution education: (1) process curriculum, in which conflict resolution is taught as a distinct lesson or course; (2) peer mediation, in which trained youth mediators work with peers to find solutions; (3) peaceable classroom and peaceable school methodologies that involve the whole educational environment; and (4) conflict resolution programs in nonschool settings, such as youth clubs or community centers. Community centers, usually found in urban areas, often collaborate with law enforcement agencies and other youth-serving agencies to present integrated programs.

According to Johnson & Johnson (1995), increasing violence and threats of violence in American schools have prompted many school districts to take aggressive action in providing greater security and more positive learning environments. In their book, they present and offer specific, practical strategies for implementing violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs. An overview of the situation and the schools' responsibility to provide students with an orderly environment is discussed. The following sequential process that schools need to follow to implement violence prevention and conflict resolution programs is also covered: (1) admit that destructive conflicts are out of control; (2) implement a violence-prevention program; (3) become a conflict-positive organization; (4) implement a conflict-resolution program; (5) create a cooperative context; (6) institute conflict-resolution/peer-mediation training that teaches students how to negotiate and mediate and teachers how to arbitrate; and (5) use academic controversy to improve education.

**Summary of the Review**

This review of literature examined research and studies focusing on the conflict situations students experienced and the recent research developments of conflict resolution programs in middle schools. The studies showed:

- violence has increased among students due to escalating conflict situations.
- most violent incidents take place among students who knew each other.
- most incidents started in school or home.
- violent behavior stems from the acceptability and justification of aggression.
- conflict resolution programs overall seem to be reducing conflicts from escalating, thus decreasing violence that could result from conflict situations.

## METHODS

This section provides information on the sample, instruments, and procedures. Descriptions include that of students who participated, the instruments employed to gather student responses that reflected their attitudes toward conflict, and seven weeks of lesson plans involving the conflict resolution curriculum used in a seventh-grade advisory classroom.

### Sample

The sample was a seventh-grade advisory class with a total of eighteen students (nine girls and nine boys). These students attended a suburban public middle school located in southeast Michigan. The middle school served a fairly homogeneous ethnic and socioeconomic level of predominantly Caucasian, middle class students. Total middle school population was 770 students in grades six through eight. There were 256 students in seventh grade divided into two teams. The students in each team were divided into smaller advisory classes with an advisory teacher. The advisory class met first period each school day for twenty minutes.

The public school district consisted of eight elementary schools (grades K to five), two middle schools (grades six to eight), one high school (grades nine to twelve), and one alternative education school. The school district had approximately 6,794 students enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district was located in a residential community of predominantly high quality brick homes with an average value of $55,300. The district served a fairly homogeneous ethnic and socioeconomic city, predominantly

Caucasian, middle class with a population of about 35,283 people. The majority of the labor force was blue-collar, working in mostly clerical, retail trade, and manufacturing jobs. Average household income was approximately $34,069.

The district was located in the southeastern part of the county, and was the fifth largest district in the county. The population of the county was 750,335 and was predominantly Caucasian and middle class. Mean wage and salary income was $43,787. Median family income was $44,586.

**Instruments**

The Project Director designed The Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts (see Appendix A, pp. 51 - 52). The survey was first piloted by two middle school teachers to clarify instructions, determine appropriateness of the questions, determine the reliability and validity of the survey, and to work out any other problems possible with the survey. The survey was then piloted by a random selection of five boys and five girls in seventh grade to get practice conducting the survey and to get feedback from students about the survey.

The Mantovani Survey consisted of thirty statements. A four-point likert scale with endpoints of strongly agree and strongly disagree was used to assess student attitudes toward conflicts, particularly what they thought conflict was (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 16), the types of conflicts they experienced (Items 7, 8, 9, 19), how conflicts were resolved (Items 10, 11, 12, 17, 22), behaviors during conflict situations (Items 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21), and what role and responsibility they had in conflicts (Items 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30).

The Project Director created a Conflict Journal for each of the eighteen students in

the advisory class. Each Conflict Journal contained handouts that were used for the Conflict Resolution Curriculum. The Conflict Journals were used to help students become aware of their feelings/perceptions, reactions/behaviors, and personal progress in response to the conflict resolution curriculum used. Students shared in their journals the actual conflicts they encountered and how they resolved those conflicts. Each week of the project students had to fill out the Conflict Journal Log Sheet in their Conflict Journal (see Appendix B, p. 53). Students wrote on their Conflict Journal Log Sheet about a conflict situation they experienced recently during the week. They wrote about their feelings, reactions, and responses toward that conflict. Students then had to think about how they might have improved their response when resolving that certain conflict.

The Project Director also kept a journal to record informal observations of students' attitudes, thoughts, responses, comments, reactions, and interactions during the seven-weeks of using the Conflict Resolution Curriculum.

**Procedures**

The Project Director was granted written permission to conduct this seven-week project to assess seventh-grade students' attitudes toward conflicts before and after applying a conflict resolution curriculum by the middle school principal and the assistant principal. Before the project's implementation began, the Project Director explained to students that they would be involved in an research project. Next, students were given The Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts (see Appendix A, pp. 51 - 52). Then the conflict resolution project was implemented three days a week for seven weeks. The lesson plans used over the course of the seven weeks were adapted from the Conflict Resolution Curriculum Guide (Knopf-DeRoche, 1995). The following

information includes the main theme of each week and the lessons and activities for each day of the week.

**Week One**: Orientation & Examining Conflict

**Day One**

- Played "Telephone: Pass the Message" in which the message "It's okay to be angry sometimes" was whispered into the ear of a student who then had to pass the message on to another. The last student has to say aloud the message she/he received.
- Introduced students to the concept of conflict by naming conflict situations in their lives.
- Students formulated a definition of conflict.

**Day Two**

- Introduced Conflict Journals.
- Students completed a conflicts list worksheet to become aware of conflicts that they may have experienced and to determine which ones need resolution.

**Day Three**

- Discussed the costs (negatives) and benefits (positives) of conflicts.

**Week Two**: Conflicts; Feelings and Actions

**Day One**

- Shared Conflict Stories.

**Day Two**

- Students filled out their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheet.

**Day Three**

- Discussed feelings and actions associated with conflicts.

**Week Three**: Feelings and Actions

**Day One**

- Students filled out their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheet.

**Day Two**

- Discussed students' personal conflicts.

**Day Three**

- Discussed students reactions and feelings to past conflicts.

**Week Four**: Skill Building: Dealing with Anger

**Day One**

- Students filled out their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheet.

**Day Two**

- Discussed how anger can escalate.

**Day Three**

• Students completed an Anatomy of Anger Handout in which they had to identify different, yet related physical, emotional, and thought processes responses when they are angry.

**Week Five**: Skill Building: Communication

**Day One**

• Students filled out their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheet.

**Day Two**

• Discussed the Steps for Solving Conflicts Handout

**Day Three**

• Students did some Role Plays, practiced Communication Scenarios, and used "I" Messages and Reflective Listening skills.

**Week Six**: Skill Building: Problem Solving

**Day One**

• Students filled out their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheet.

**Day Two**

• Discussed the Three C's: Control it, Confront it, Channel it.

**Day Three**

• Practiced some Problem Solving Scenarios.

**Week Seven**: Skill Building: Putting It All Together

**Day One**

• Students filled out their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheet.

**Day Two**

• Discussed choosing "Win-Win" solutions.

**Day Three**

• Closure discussion.

## RESULTS

The results section of the research project includes three sub-sections. The first section displays the results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflict into five tables. The second section is a narrative of the conflict journal log sheet responses. The third section is the journal summary.

Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflict (see Appendix A, pp. 51 - 52) had five main dimensions of focus: thoughts on conflict, conflict experiences, conflict resolution, behaviors during conflict situations, and the role and responsibility in conflicts. For the survey students responded to thirty statements regarding their attitudes about conflict. Student response options were "SA" for strongly agree, "AS" for agree somewhat, "DS" for disagree somewhat, and "SD" for strongly disagree.

Table 1 entitled "Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Thoughts on Conflict Dimension," consisted of seven items. These items were statements to which students were asked to respond strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree. The responses were totaled before and after the project.

Table 2 entitled "Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Conflict Experiences Dimension," consisted of four items. These items were statements to which students were asked to respond strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree. The responses were totaled before

and after the project.

Table 3 entitled "Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Conflict Resolution Dimension," consisted of five items. These items were statements to which students were asked to respond strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree. The responses were totaled before and after the project.

Table 4 entitled "Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Behavior Dimension," consisted of six items. These items were statements to which students were asked to respond strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree. The responses were totaled before and after the project.

Table 5 entitled "Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Role & Responsibility Dimension," consisted of eight items. These items were statements to which students were asked to respond strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree. The responses were totaled before and after the project.

The Narrative of the Conflict Journal Responses section was obtained from the Conflict Journal Log Sheets (see Appendix B, p. 53) students had recorded in their Conflict Journals. The narrative indicates any changes in the situations, feelings, reactions, or responses students experienced with conflict situations during the seven weeks of the project.

The Journal Summary section includes informal observations recorded in a journal by the Project Director during the seven weeks of the project. This section summarizes the observations made by the Project Director on the students' reactions to the lessons

and activities conducted during the implementation of the conflict curriculum during the seven-week project.

**Tables**

Table 1. Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Thoughts on Conflict Dimension.

| Items | Before | | | | After | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | AS | DS | SD | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 1. Violence in our world is a major issue. | 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. Everyone experiences conflicts. | 10 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 3. Conflict is a bad thing. | 2 | 4 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 0 |
| 4. Conflict is a normal part of life. | 10 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 5. I have conflicts in my life. | 7 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| 6. Conflict signals that something needs to change. | 2 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| 16. It is important to understand what causes a conflict. | 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

Table 1 displays the results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Thoughts on Conflict Dimension. For the survey students responded to seven statements regarding their thoughts about conflict. The survey was given before and after the project. For purposes of comparison, the before and after results are shown.

Item 1 shows that both before and after the project most students agree that "Violence in our world is a major issue." There was a slight increase in the number that strongly agree from twelve to sixteen students. Item 2 shows that most students agree "Everyone experiences conflicts," yet there was also a slight increase from ten to fourteen that strongly agree. Item 3 "Conflict is a bad thing" shows a decrease in the number of students that disagree somewhat from ten to fifteen.

Items 4, 5, 6, and 16 each show increases in the number of students that strongly agree and agree somewhat from before to after the project. Item 4 shows a significant

increase from ten students that strongly agree with the statement "Conflict is a normal part of life" before the project to sixteen after the project. Item 5 shows three more students strongly agree after the project with the statement "I have conflicts in my life." Item 6 "Conflict signals that something needs to change" shows a slight increase from eight students that agree somewhat to eleven after the project. Item 16 "It is important to understand what causes a conflict" shows an increase of three students from the agree somewhat to the strongly agree after the project.

Table 2. Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Conflict Experiences Dimension.

| Items | Before | | | | After | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | AS | DS | SD | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 7. There is only one type of conflict. | 1 | 2 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 16 |
| 8. I avoid any type of conflict. | 2 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 1 |
| 9. I don't care if I have conflicts with a person. | 1 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 6 |
| 19. We can be involved in a conflict even if we're not actually a part of it. | 3 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 11 | 2 | 0 |

Table 2 displays the results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Conflict Experiences Dimension. For the survey students responded to four statements regarding their conflict experiences. The survey was given before and after the project. For purposes of comparison, the before and after results are shown.

Item 7 shows an increase of six students that strongly disagree with the statement "There is only one type of conflict." There is also no strongly agree or agree somewhat responses after the project. Item 8 "I avoid any type of conflict" does not show any significant changes in the responses from before to after the project. Item 9 " I don't care if I have conflicts with a person" shows an increase of three students from the agree somewhat to the disagree somewhat response after the project. Item 19 "We can be

involved in a conflict even if we're not actually a part of it" shows an increase toward the strongly agree and agree somewhat end and a decrease in the disagree somewhat to no responses in the strongly disagree which had two before the project.

Table 3. Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Conflict Resolution Dimension.

| Items | Before | | | | After | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | AS | DS | SD | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 10. I do not like having conflicts with a person. | 8 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 10 | 1 | 0 |
| 11. I like having help with a conflict. | 7 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 0 |
| 12. Winning conflicts no matter what is important. | 0 | 4 | 10 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 5 |
| 17. Each person in a conflict should get a chance to explain his/her perspective. | 12 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| 22. Sometimes the issue or the relationship make it difficult to work conflicts out on our own. | 3 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 12 | 1 | 0 |

Table 3 displays the results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Conflict Resolution Dimension. For the survey students responded to five statements regarding conflict resolution. The survey was given before and after the project. For purposes of comparison, the before and after results are shown.

Item 10 does not show a significant change in students' responses after the project that they mostly agree with the statement "I do not like having conflicts with a person." Item 11 "I like having help with a conflict" shows an decrease of two students that disagree somewhat toward the agree end. Item 12 shows that three more students changed their response of agree somewhat before the project to disagree somewhat and strongly disagree after the project. There were no students that strongly agree with the statement "Winning conflicts no matter what is important." Item 17 "Each person in a conflict should get a chance to explain his/her perspective" shows an increase of two

student responses from agree somewhat to strongly agree. No one strongly disagreed with Item 17 before or after the project. Item 22 "Sometimes the issue or the relationship make it difficult to work conflicts out on our own" shows only an increase of one response from the agree somewhat response to strongly agree.

Table 4. Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Behavior Dimension.

| Items | Before | | | | After | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | AS | DS | SD | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 13. Conflicts should always be avoided. | 2 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| 14. Some behaviors make a conflict worse or upset people. | 9 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 13 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| 15. Some behaviors calm conflicts down or make people feel better. | 4 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 11 | 6 | 1 | 0 |
| 18. It is okay to resort to violence when in a conflict. | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 12 |
| 20. Bullies are not born bullies; they learn how to bully. | 9 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| 21. Bystanders have the ability to speak up and stop the violence in a conflict. | 9 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 0 |

Table 4 displays the results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Behavior Dimension. For the survey students responded to six statements regarding behaviors during conflict situations. The survey was given before and after the project. For purposes of comparison, the before and after results are shown.

Item 13 shows only one increase from the strongly agree to the agree somewhat for the statement "Conflicts should always be avoided." Item 14 shows an increase after the project of four students that strongly agree that "Some behaviors make a conflict worse or upset people." Item 15 shows a very significant increase of seven students that agreed somewhat that "Some behaviors calm conflicts down or make people feel better" to strongly agree after the project.

Item 18 shows a decrease of three students after the project that strongly agree that "It is okay to resort to violence when in a conflict." Two more students disagree somewhat and another two students strongly disagree with Item 18 after the project. Item 20 "Bullies are not born bullies; they learn how to bully" shows an increase of three students that agreed somewhat before the project that strongly agreed after the project. There were no students that strongly disagreed with Item 20 before or after the project. Item 21 "Bystanders have the ability to speak up and stop the violence in a conflict" shows an increase of only one strongly agree response and a decrease of two disagree somewhat responses after the project.

Table 5. Results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Role & Responsibility Dimension.

| Items | Before | | | | After | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | AS | DS | SD | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 23. A peacemaker is a person who cares about all living things and tries to understand other people's perspectives. | 10 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 11 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| 24. Everyone can be a peacemaker. | 9 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 13 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| 25. I am a peacemaker. | 2 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 1 | 0 |
| 26. I can help resolve conflicts. | 5 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 12 | 1 | 0 |
| 27. I would prefer to take care of a conflict without intervention. | 4 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 5 | 1 |
| 28. I am responsible for my actions. | 10 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 12 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| 29. I respect myself. | 13 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 30. I respect others. | 11 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 |

Table 5 displays the results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts - Role & Responsibility Dimension. For the survey students responded to six statements regarding their role and responsibility during conflict situations. The survey was given before and after the project. For purposes of comparison, the before and after results are shown.

Item 23 "A peacemaker is a person who cares about all living things and tries to understand other people's perspectives" shows an increase of only one disagree somewhat response to the strongly agree response. Four more students strongly agree with Item 24 "Everyone can be a peacemaker" after the project. There was only one decrease for the strongly disagree response to Item 25 "I am a peacemaker" that moved to an increase of one agree somewhat response.

There was no change in students' responses to Item 26 "I can help resolve conflicts" before and after the project. Item 27 had only one increase to strongly agree from disagree somewhat in response to the statement "I would prefer to take care of a conflict without intervention." Item 28 "I am responsible for my actions" shows an increase of two students to the strongly agree response after the project. There were no disagree responses to Item 29 and Item 30. For both Items 29 "I respect myself" and 30 "I respect others," there was only one more student that changed from the agree somewhat to the strongly agree response after the project.

**Narrative of the Conflict Journal Responses**

The Project Director had all eighteen students involved in the project keep conflict journals. These student conflict journals contained all the handouts used in each conflict resolution lesson and activity that occurred during the seven-week project. The main focus of the student conflict journal was the information students recorded on their weekly Conflict Journal Log Sheets (see Appendix B, p. 53). Students shared in their journals the actual conflicts they encountered and how they resolved those conflicts. They wrote about their feelings, reactions, and responses toward that conflict. Students then had to think about how they might have improved their response when resolving

that certain conflict. The Project Director made note of any changes in the situations, feelings, reactions, or responses students experienced with conflict situations during the seven weeks of the project.

The Project Director noticed that the Conflict Journal Log Sheets students used to record their conflicts appeared to help students become more aware of their feelings/perceptions, reactions/behaviors, and personal progress toward conflict resolution. The students were not discreet with what they wrote in their journals. For example, early into the project one female student reported having an argument with another female student in which she pushed this girl on the floor and then walked away. She said she felt bad that she pushed the girl and was scared that the girl or her friends would eventually fight her. She wished she had just walked away from the argument before she started pushing because she could feel herself get extremely angry. After several weeks in the project, this same student said she wished she knew the conflict resolution techniques that she was learning before this conflict situation occurred because she felt she could better handle it.

Another example from the Conflict Journals that displayed the seriousness of the conflicts middle school students experience is that of a male student who felt some other male students were making fun of him. He reported on his Conflict Journal Log Sheet that he would yell and swear at them to stop, but that just made them laugh and mock him more. One day, he got so fed up that he skipped school and instead stayed home and pranked these other boys' houses. He admitted that he even told one of the boy's parents over the phone that their son was going to get beat up after school someday because of what he was doing.

**Journal Summary**

The Project Director kept an anecdotal record, or journal, regarding the observations made during the seven-week project. The Project Director observed that during the seven weeks, the attitudes of the students when discussing conflicts and how to resolve conflicts improved. Before the project, some students were not even familiar with what a conflict was. After a discussion of what a conflict was and some examples of conflicts they experience were given, students had a better understanding of what a conflict was. The Project Director observed that in the beginning of the project students thought of only fighting as a conflict. Over the course of seven weeks students became more aware of other forms of conflict, including arguments and personal conflicts with one's self.

The Project Director noted that while performing conflict situations, students really got into their roles and played their parts seriously. Through these conflict skits, the Project Director noticed that students started to realize how absurd some of the conflicts were. This led into discussions of how these conflicts could be resolved better. It was observed that students learned how communication is key to resolving conflicts. They said that the way people speak to one another can either help or hurt how a conflict is going to end. The students also said that when having a conflict over a misunderstanding that it is important to hear both sides of the store first before trying to resolve the conflict.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project is completed in an effort to examine students' attitudes about conflict and violence. Adolescents are at high risk for violent crime. This violence is partly attributable to escalating sequences of events that culminate in outcomes unintended by the participants. Both students and teachers feel unsafe and insecure due to increasingly violent, disruptive behaviors of students. The purpose of this project, therefore, is to determine the effectiveness a conflict resolution curriculum has on the attitudes and interactions of seventh-grade students.

The Project Director reviewed literature that focused on conflict situations students, particularly middle school students, experience in today's schools. The studies showed how conflicts had changed over time and how violence has increased due to escalating conflict situations students experience. Recent developments in research on conflict resolution programs and interventions were also reviewed. The studies showed that the conflict resolution programs overall seemed to be reducing conflicts from escalating, thus decreasing violence that could result from conflict situations.

After gathering students' responses to the The Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts (see Appendix A, pp. 51 - 52) that reflected their attitudes toward conflict, the Project Director conducted seven weeks of lesson plans and activities involving the conflict resolution curriculum used in the seventh-grade advisory classroom. Using the Conflict Journal Log Sheets (see Appendix B, p. 53) that students had completed each week, the Project Director noted any changes in the conflict situations students experienced and the ways students resolved the conflicts during the seven-week

project. The responses were compared at the beginning of the project to the responses at the ending of the project to determine if the conflict resolution curriculum was effective in helping students resolve conflicts without resorting to situations that could lead to violence.

The results of this seven-week project were obtained from the three instruments used, including a survey, a conflict journal log sheet, and the Project Director's journal. The responses to the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts compared any changes in students' attitudes about conflict before and after the project. The responses recorded in the Conflict Journal Log Sheets displayed the effectiveness of the conflict resolution curriculum on how students resolved their conflicts. The informal observations recorded in the journal by the Project Director showed any changes in students' attitudes, responses, comments, and interactions during the seven weeks of using the conflict resolution curriculum.

The results from the Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts showed significant changes in the attitudes students had toward conflicts and how to resolve conflicts since implementing the conflict resolution curriculum. The responses recorded in the Conflict Journal Log Sheets showed that students became more effective in resolving their conflicts since the beginning of the seven-week project. The following conclusions were drawn as a result of this project.

**Conclusions**

The following conclusions were made by the Project Director based on an analysis of the results of the seven-week project conducted to determine the effectiveness a conflict resolution curriculum had on the attitudes and interactions of seventh-grade

students:

1. Students learned that conflict was a natural occurrence and that conflict itself was not necessarily bad. They learned that conflict had the potential for being either constructive or destructive, based on their response to it. Students realized that conflicts can lead to violence, which has been a major problem in our world.

2. Students learned what a conflict situation was and the importance in understanding what caused a conflict. They became more aware of their own conflict experiences. They noticed that their behavior in a conflict situation affected the outcome of the conflict and that they were responsible for their behavior.

3. Students began to notice their own feelings and reactions to conflicts. They reflected on the many different feelings people experiencde when dealing with conflicts, and learned that all feelings were all right.

4. Students recognized the importance of accepting their feelings associated with conflicts. They explored their feelings of anger and fear as a natural and inevitable emotion associated with conflicts. Students had a better understanding of the consequences that were associated with their anger-based actions.

5. Students explored the kinds of situations that had led to more serious or violent conflicts. This helped them to become more aware of their choices when acting upon their feelings.

6. Students practiced the problem solving communication skills learned to help resolve conflicts. Students practiced using "I" messages, which kept the communication focused on each person's feelings and needs rather than blaming each other. When blame was involved, the other person felt defensive and was less likely to solve conflicts.

7. Students practiced reflective listening skills when telling their sides of conflict situations. This involved listening with complete attention to what the person was saying, then repeating back in your own words what that person had said. Students also experienced good listening for themselves.

8. Students practiced using the "win-win" approach to solving conflicts. This approach allowed each person's needs to be considered. The solutions to the conflicts then met those needs.

9. Students resolved conflicts using resolution skills, which helped to de-escalate conflicts, rather than through fighting and other forms of violence. These skills included calming down, communicating, and problem solving.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the conclusions of the project regarding the effectiveness a conflict resolution curriculum has on the attitudes and interactions of seventh-grade students:

1. Schools need to give students the tools and information to deal with conflicts non-

violently. Schools are in a position of seeing the effects of our violence-prone society on students and their behavior.

2. The challenge for families and educators is to teach, model, and nurture our young people with a healthy orientation toward conflict resolution. Students need to view conflict resolution as a helpful skill in resolving conflicts in their lives.

3. Teachers and administrators need to have well developed rules or guidelines regarding how conflicts are handled in their classroom and building. Students need guidance when it comes to resolving conflicts because they may not know any other way to resolving a conflict other than through fighting. Students also need to know what consequences they may face because of the actions they take.

4. Teaching students the importance of listening to others and the affirmation of being listened to is a technique that should be modeled continually as well as taught and practiced. As a result, learning may become more meaningful for all students.

5. Districts need to consider implementing a conflict resolution program into their schools. Teachers need training in what the skills and procedures are to teach classes in conflict resolution if a program is to be effective and successful. Teachers also need support and encouragement from their district when using a conflict resolution program

6. Teachers must help students build conflict resolution skills, including how to deal with anger, how to communicate, and how to solve problems. Students need to be encouraged

and given appropriate time and guidance to practice these skills.

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness a conflict resolution curriculum had on the attitudes and interactions of seventh-grade students. The results seemed to indicate that students demonstrated a more "pro-social" attitude toward conflict as a result of implementing the conflict resolution curriculum. Thus, the conflict resolution curriculum appeared to have been effective in increasing students' awareness of conflict situations and ways to resolve conflicts. An overall key outcome associated with positively resolving conflicts was that successful resolution reinforced positive and empowered attitudes toward conflict, and therefore influenced attitudes and beliefs when the individual encountered a conflict situation.

Social skills training, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills help students foster healthy lifestyle choices and should be endorsed by public schools. Middle school students can learn the pro-social skills essential to their intellectual, affective and social development. Acquisition of these skills, such as anger awareness and management, is often the mediating factor between healthy and unhealthy lifestyle choices.

By instilling conflict resolution programs in schools, students can learn that conflict is natural, difference is the norm, and only through reflective thought and respectful communication will we find common human dimension. Teachers and students alike need to become, in their living and their thinking, truly non-violent, just, and peaceful persons. The research studies reviewed, the results of this project, and the general observations made by the Project Director suggest promising outcomes of conflict resolution programs in schools.

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**Appendix A**
**The Mantovani Survey on Students' Attitudes about Conflicts**

Name:_____ Date:_____ Circle: M or F

Instructions: Circle the response that is most similar to your attitude about each statement using the code: **SA** for *Strongly Agree*, **AS** for *Agree Somewhat*, **DS** for *Disagree Somewhat*, **SD** for *Strongly Disagree*.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Violence in our world is a major issue. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 2. Everyone experiences conflicts. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 3. Conflict is a bad thing. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 4. Conflict is a normal part of life. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 5. I have conflicts in my life. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 6. Conflict signals that something needs to change. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 7. There is only one type of conflict. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 8. I avoid any type of conflict. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 9. I don't care if I have conflicts with a person. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 10. I do not like having a conflict with someone. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 11. I like having help with the conflict. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 12. Winning conflicts no matter what is important. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 13. Conflicts should always be avoided. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 14. Some behaviors make a conflict worse or upset people. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 15. Some behaviors calm conflicts down or | SA | AS | DS | SD |

make people feel better.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. It is important to understand what causes a conflict. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 17. Each person in a conflict should get a chance to explain his/her perspective. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 18. It is okay to resort to violence when in a conflict. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 19. We can be involved in a conflict even if we're not actually a part of it. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 20. Bullies are not born bullies; they learn how to bully. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 21. Bystanders have the ability to speak up and stop the violence in a conflict. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 22. Sometimes the issue or the relationship make it difficult to work conflicts out on our own. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 23. A peacemaker is a person who cares about all living things and tries to understand other people's perspectives. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 24. Everyone can be a peacemaker. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 25. I am a peacemaker. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 26. I can help resolve conflicts. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 27. I would prefer to take care of a conflict without intervention. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 28. I am responsible for my actions. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 29. I respect myself. | SA | AS | DS | SD |
| 30. I respect others. | SA | AS | DS | SD |

**Appendix B**

**CONFLICT JOURNAL LOG SHEET**

WEEK of _____

| Situations | Feelings | Reactions | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|